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Research paper

The Popularity of Asian Drama Series on Malaysian Television

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Abstract

The Asian drama series has reached high popularity level among local viewers since this popular culture has penetrated into our local entertainment industry. The scheduling of the government or the private television stations specific to Asian drama series has increased when the response is very encouraging from the local viewers. Viewers are an important commodity in the capitalist system whereby when a cultural product obtains high viewing rating, automatically the popularity is also going to be high. Thus, for these Asian dramas series to achieve popularity, they need to draw the interest and demand of viewers in this region, where it can be explained through the concept of regionalization. Regionalization gives the priority to the psychology and phenomenon about the cultural approach and the cultural discount. This concept justifies the phenomenon of Asian drama series popularity in the Asian region. The content analysis and interview have been used in this study to analyze the elements contained in the Asian drama series, and whether or not they contribute to their popularity also perspective from local drama producers towards this phenomenon. Similarities in terms of the theme, characterization and narratives contained in the popular Asian drama series in this current work are the method and approach adopted in this work to reduce the cultural discount whereby through this similarity it has started to build the identity and characteristics of the Asian drama series seen as accepted and welcome by Asian viewers- something which is known as the cultural approach. The outcome of the study also shows that from the mainstream theme, good scripts, the right choice of artists and appropriate theme songs in the drama that they contribute to high popularity and altogether leave an impact to the Malaysian TV industry. Producers are in full authority not only in executive work but also in terms of the creativity. The decision made by a producer of a drama is vital to render a drama series a success.

Keywords: *Asian drama series; Malaysian TV; Regionalisation*

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the East Asian popular culture transcends the borders of the region (1) and this automatically delves into the social life of the communities across Asia. The products of this popular culture such as TV dramas, pop music, animes and so on mostly come from East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. The mass media plays an important role in disseminating these products and the television has become one of the medium that bring the popular culture products into the locals. Since the setting up of the television in Malaysia in 1963 namely Televisyen Malaysia, outside programmes especially from the West (Hollywood) were imported for broadcast to fulfill the television slot and this proved to be the primary strategy in the industry. The Malaysian government had introduced the Privatization Policy in 1984 which spurred a lot of private television stations like TV3, MetroVision, MegaTV, TV9, ntv7, 8tv and the era of the satellite, ASTRO was introduced in 2005. Programmes from Hollywood, Chinese dramas imported from Hong Kong also Taiwan, also Hindi and Tamil dramas were also broadcast in both private and government stations starting from the 80s.

The products of popular culture do not only cross over the East Asian countries, but the phenomenon also hits the Asian countries. A lot of studies have tried to explain about this phenomenon, where this cultural product is popularized and goes appropriately in the regional nations. According to Iwabuchi (2), this phenomenon is seen as a new process to globalization where the format and style are the same like the United States or the West but have been modified for the 'Asian Taste" (3). Even according to Choi (4), the flow of the cultural product across the region is seen as the process of cultural regionalisation and it prioritises the psychology and the phenomenon about the cultural approach that has stressed on geography, history, ethnic closeness and emotions.

The drama trend brought by the Malaysian television station has become popular back in the 1990s and this is followed by the Hallyu phenomenon (*韩流*) or the Korean wave in the 2000 such as the drama series Winter Sonata which recorded a total number of views of 1.2 million in 2003 (5) . According to the study done by Juliana A.W. (6), the drama series is the genre that receives the most slots in the Malaysian television station and is one of the TV genres that are increasingly popular in Malaysia for the past few years, be it at the private TV station or government station. Several local TV stations have a TV slot for the broadcast of Korean drama as in TV2 (Crystal Slot), ntv7 (Korean Drama), 8tv (Best of The East), TV9 (Saranghae Slot) and paid television Astro have channels KBS and One. Korean wave continued to hit the local market with popular drama series like *Jewel in the Palace*, *My Love Affair*, *Autumn Fairy Tale*, *Joyful Girl*, *My Love Patsi* and many more.

Not only the drama series imported from East Asian that were very well received by the Malaysian society, those from the South East Asia especially Indonesia, the Phillipines, Thailand, and Singapore also received very good responses. In the analysis done by Juliana(7), there are 10 countries which provide these programmes to the TV stations in this country and Indonesia is one of the countries that import their programmes to Malaysia. The founding of Asean, *The Association of Southeast of Asia Nation* in 1967 seeks

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to spur the growth of the economy, social and culture with the collaboration with other countries in the region becoming a factor, where Malaysia imports programs from Indonesia. Malaysia attempts to introduce the culture of the regional community through the programs broadcast in the television and the Senitron is one of the channels(8). The drama series *Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah* is the Asean program with the highest viewer rating which is 3.8 million viewers (8).

In the 80s, the television industry in Malaysia has also started to increase its production of local dramas *series* and the quota policy towards the ratio of the local programmes and imported ones is 60:40 as proposed by the Information Ministry have become the catalyst to the increasing number of local programmes. (5). From the analysis done by Juliana (7), it is found that there are several stations in Malaysia which have a higher ratio of local programmes compared to the imported ones. Locally produced dramas have grabbed the attention of either the TV stations, producers even viewers themselves. More and more production houses were founded to produce these dramas series and about 343 productions were registered under FINAS (National Film Development Corporation Malaysia). Every television station, whether the government, private, paid and free broadcast these local dramas of various languages for viewers of various race. In 2011, the last episode of the drama entitled *Nora Elena* under TV3's Akasia Slot had reached the highest hit with the viewers. The official web portal of TV3, had the highest record with 295,309 displays of pages with the total hits 116,311 surfers shown through the special web named *Parti Tonton Nora Elena*. This drama series also contributed to the highest daily hits for Tonton which reached 444,853 of page displays (2).

2. Research Issues

Popular cultural products in East Asia like the TV dramas series have transcended the borders of the region since the 1980s. Iwabuchi (5) stated that this phenomenon is regarded as a new process to where the products are modified for the "Asean Taste" but Choi (4) saw the flow of cultural products in this region as a process of regionalisation that prioritises the psychology and the phenomenon about the cultural similarity and the cultural discount. This phenomenon is felt by our country at the end of the 1990, when there was more and more importation of programmes from the Asian region to our country following the content of agreement of Asian Free Trade Areas or AFTA. There was an increase in the number of Asian dramas series that fills the slots in the government or private television stations as these products of popular culture received very good responses among the locals. This regionalisation concept has been able to explain the phenomenon of the Asian drama series popularity in the Asian region.

These Asian dramas series have their own loyal followers who follow through every episode – they are the commodity that plays such a big role in the capitalist system. John Fiske (9) pointed out that viewers have such a great autonomy and the dramas automatically gained great popularity. Thus, to popularize the cultural products, they need to grab the attention of diverse kinds of viewers. Two questions can be raised- why are these Asian dramas series very popular and what are the elements contained in them that contribute to such popularity, to the point that they become a phenomenon in this region and influence the scheduling of the local TV stations? Therefore, this study is done to see the content of the popular Asian dramas series that they contribute to high popularity and leave an impact to the Malaysian TV industry.

3. Study Methodology

3.1. Content Analysis

In this study, the content analysis is the first method was adopted to see the drama content to identify the differences and similarities in the dramas series selected. Analysis was carried out to see the aspect of theme used also the plot aiming to see the development of the main and the side plots, in the dramas series analysed. The characterisation of the main actors was also analysed in every drama series selected and the portrayal and how the main characters are represented are assessed. All in all, this text analysis is used to analyse three contents of 3 Asian dramas series selected. They are from Malaysia, Indonesia dan Korea. The drama series from Malaysia is entitled *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013). It has 28 episodes and was shown every Monday to Thursday on TV3, a private TV station. The drama series *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) had reached 3.5 million viewers (Harian Metro, 27 Ogos 2013). The second drama series is a Sinetron entitled *Aishiteru* (2011) where this drama was aired on Astro Ria in the mid-year of 2013. It has 37 episodes and aired every Monday to Friday at 6.30 pm. The drama *Aishiteru* (2011) aired on Astro Ria had the viewer rating of 300,000 viewers where it was a foreign drama series with the highest viewing rating in June 2013(Nielsen Audience Measurement, 2 Jun 2013). Meanwhile, the drama series chosen from Korea was one entitled *Secret Garden* (2011) aired through the slot Best of the East 8tv in 2012. The drama with 20 episodes had reached the viewing rating of 35.2 million viewers on the last episode and it won several awards at the SBS Drama Awards in 2010, 47th Beaksang Awards in 2011 and 6th Seoul International drama Awards in 2011 (10).

3.2. Interview Method

The next method is the interview method done on the producers of these popular dramas series namely Suriati Sidek and Julia Juhasu. Suriati Sidek is the producer for *Nora Elena* and *Vanila Coklat* where these dramas created their own phenomena back in 2011 and 2012. In the meantime, Julia Juhasu was the producer for *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013). This part of the study will look into the factors that contribute to the popularity of local dramas and Asian dramas from the perspective of the industry through the interviews with these two local producers.

The producer plays an important role in the production where he or she not only has the executive power but they also have an autonomy in creativity (11). He also stated that a producer is also responsible in the casting of artists, director and script writer for his or her program and this person also functions as a coordinator between the TV station and the production house. They also play the main role in the development of the narrative of every drama series, making sure that it fulfills the needs and demands of the viewers. Thus, both the producers will be able to answer questions concerning increasingly popular dramas series among the viewers. The main purpose of the interview is to collect "initial data" to know the contributing factors for the popularity of the dramas under their production, and the drama popularity as a whole, from the viewpoint of the industry.

4. Study Outcome

4.1. The Similarities and Differences of the Themes, Main Characters' Characterization and Narratives.

4.1.1. Theme

There are some similarities and differences in terms of representing the theme, main characters and narrative in all three dramas series selected. Thus, the cultural discount and cultural similarity concepts are evident through the comparison analysed in terms of the theme, portrayal of the main characters and narratives in the three dramas series selected from the Asian region. The drama series *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) , *Aishiteru* (2011) and *Secret Garden* (2011) carry the same theme which is teenage love

in the cosmopolitan. The love theme had been used in *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) where it revolves around love that is built upon an arranged marriage by the parents. *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) tells the story of Zain who comes from a wealthy family, is abandoned by his fiancee so his mother, Datin Adibah decides to match her son with Ersalina who just finishes her SPM. Their love sparks after marriage and there are many obstacles that they have to face in their relationship. The setting of this drama is the city and it portrays the life of a teenager who has a family in Kuala Lumpur. Other than that, family is also another theme introduced in *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) where it highlights the life of a newly married couple -Zain dan Ersalina, the love of her mother to her son, and the trust between a husband and his wife. For instance, the character of Ersalina tries to learn to be a good wife after marriage, she learns to cook for her husband and treat her husband well although they hardly know each other before they are married. Other than that, the mother to Ersalina named Puan Haliza tries very hard to protect her daughter by accepting the marriage proposal by Datin Adibah to cover the sinned Ersalina (who carries a baby out of wedlock).

The drama series *Aishiteru* (2011) also has the same theme of love, and it talks about the love triangle between Tasya, Tristan and Randy in a cosmopolitan city. Tristan and Randy try to protect Tasya from all her miseries brought along by her step mother and step sister. Tristian is willing to let go of Tasya to Randy bcause he wants to see Tasya happy with him although Tristan loves her very much. The Cinderella-like narrative is used in the drama series *Aishiteru* (2011), as it sheds light on Tasya who has been bullied by her stepmother and sister without the knowledge of Tasya's father and finally she is rescued by two men who are in love with her. There is also the issue of family in this drama series (2011) like the life of a family who has a stepmother and a daughter who is dearly loved by her father – her father tries to protect Tasya when he learns about the abuse his wife has committed to her. Also, Randy's father tries to help his son by seeking for help from various parties when Randy is kidnapped by Tasya's mother.

The theme of love is also used in *Secret Garden* (2011). In this series drama, it revolves around the relationship between the owner of the largest shopping mall in Seoul with a poor girl who works as a stunt actor. The love theme raised in this drama is more on the love between two persons of different statuses. Kim Joo-Wun comes from a well-off family and he is the director in the largest shopping mall in Seoul and he does not expect that he would fall in love with a poor woman, named Gil Ra-Im. Apart from that, another subplot used in *Secret Garden (2011)* also uses the theme of love in terms of the love of a famous singer, Oska neglected by his girlfriend and finally he is reunited with her. There is also the issue of family in *Secret Garden* (2011). As an example, Gil Ra-Im's father helps his daughter to find true love so that she can be happy with the man she loves, who is Kim Jun-Won.

All three Asian drama series have the same theme which is love and the differences lie in how this theme is represented and modified to suit the culture and the custom of the country. For example, for the drama series *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) it shows the love between Zain and Ersalina after their marriage and this is very much encouraged in Islam. Family values are also raised in the selected dramas and these are undeniably the values of Asia. Thus, to reduce the cultural discount in dramas like *Asihiteru* (2011) and *Secret Garden* (2011) to be shown in other countries, the love theme is selected as the theme, as it is a universally accepted theme. Asian values are also put forth in every drama so that they will create relateable feelings and emotions among Asian viewers and this can be seen as part of the cultural similarity.

4.1.2. The Characterization of Main Characters

Zain is the main male character in the drama series *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013). He is a director in his family's company and his family is wealthy. The character of Zain likes to wear shirts, suits and collared T-shirts showing that he is well-off. Zain lives in a big bungalow together with his family and he drives a fancy car. He also works out at this one fitness place with his close friend. In this drama, Zain is arranged to marry Ersalina by his mother when she is abandoned by her fiance. Zain is a jealous-type especially when he learns that hsi wife is using him as the scapegoat. Zain is also portrayed as a man who loves his wife and he tries to protect her despite the fact the she has lied to him.

Meanwhile, Ersalina is a happy-go-lucky teenager and she has just finished her schooling (in *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa*) (2013). Ersalina loves to watch Korean dramas and read love novels and she does not mind sleeping late at night to watch it. Ersalina is asked to marry a man she does not know on her mother's request and she has to accept it because her boyfriend, Iqram has left her all of a sudden. Ersalina is pregnant and the child is her boyfriend's without the knowledge of herself and her family, and she has a miscarriage when she and her husband, Zain try to reach an agreement after marriage. Ersalina tries to be a good wife despite her young age. She learns from her mother and her mother in law how to treat her husband, how to cook, communicate with him and so on. Ersalina is surrounded by men who want to protect her, Zain, Iqram also Hadi Zain's colleague and close friend.

Tasya is the main female character in *Aishiteru* (2011). She is an easygoing, beautiful woman who has avery doting father but her father has remarried another woman who already has a daughter. Tasya is constantly suffering because she is bullied by her step mother to work at their restaurant. She perseveres, and she is brave in facing the adversities and obstacles caused by her stepmother and stepsister. Tasya has a very pleasant voice ad her hobby is singing. As she has a lovely voice and is very kind, Tristan has fallen in love with her. A lot of men around her love her and ty to protect her from the hardship and suffering brought by her stepmother. Tasya finds it difficult to choose any one of them because they are both special to her.

Tristan and Randy are two main male characters in *Asihiteru* (2011). Tristan and Randy have different characters. Tristan is a very kind man and he protects Tasya with all her might as Tristan loves Tasya with all honesty. He is the hotel director and is very rich. Randy however, is a street gangster and materialistic. Tasya's stepmother hires Randy to seduce Tasya so she could distance herself from Tristan. Randy has the same hobby like Tasya which is singing. Finally,Randy has fallen in love with Tasya because Tasya has a kind heart and is honest. Tristan and Randy tries to protect Tasya from all the evil deeds done by Tasya's stepmother to her.

The main male character in *Secret Garden* (2011) is Kim Joo-Won and he is the director of the largest shopping mall in Seoul and he really prioritises his appearance. Kim Joo-Won comes from a wealthy family and he inherits his grandfather's property- the man who now has a new wife. . Kim Joo-Wun never knows or lives in poverty due to his background until he meets Gil Ra-Im. He feels that he only wants to meet the girl with the same status as he is so his mother always arranges meetings with equally well-off women but he is not interested with them. Kim Joo-Wun's attention is drawn to Gil Ra-Im who is not of the same status as he is and he has this strange feelings towards Gil Ra-Im. Thus, he is always looking for Gil Ra-Im to know more about her. Meanwhile, Gil Ra-Im is the main female character in the story (2011). Gil Ra-Im lives in hardship when she loses her father who is the breadwinner of the family but Gil Ra-Im is still determined to live her life. She works as a stunt actor and with her meagre earning she has to rent a room with her close friend who lives in the suburb She wants to be famous internationally so everyday she works hard to reach that dream. She is also surrounded by suitors who also protect her for

instance Kim Joo-Wun and Im Joong-So who is a director at the martial arts center.

Thus, there are some similarities represneted by main male and female characters in the drama series *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013), *Aishiteru* (2011) and *Secret Garden* (2011). The male characters in all three dramas are known as "beauty masculin"for example Kim Joo-Wun who prioritises his appearances in terms of his dressing and his lifestyle like he loves to read books, not eating unhealthy foods and so on. Meanwhile, Zain in *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) also takes care of his appearance and this can be seen in his dressing. This can be seen in the character of Tristan in *Aishiteru* (2011). Other than that, being rich is also the character of the male character in the popular Asian drama series For instance, the character named Zain is the son to a Datuk and he runs his family business, the character of Tristan is a director of a hotel and he has a yatch and so is the character of Kim Joo-Wun the director of the largest shopping mall in Seoul who has luxurious house and car.

The similarities of the female characters are represented in the three dramas as having their own personality where they are different from others. The character of Ersalina for instance, is represented as a beautiful woman, and she has her own personality. This is also evident in the female characters of *Aishiteru* (2011) and *Secret Garden* (2011). Other than that, the main female characters in all three dramas are also surrounded by men who wish to protect them. For instance, there are Zain, Iqram and Hadi in *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) where they have a conflict to win the heart of Ersalina. Also, Tasya is protected by Tristan, Randy and Fajar in the drama series *Aishiteru* (2011) while Gil Ra-Im is also surrounded by men who serenade her Kim Joo-Wun and Im Joong-So.

Thus, it is found that the similarities between the male and female characters represented in these Asian dramas series receive very good responses by the local viewers, where the male characters are beautiful and masculine, wealthy and protect their women whereas the female characters are beautiful, have their own personality and admired by men around them. Therefore, the similarities of the characters are those made universal in the region and this has formed an Asian identity from the global perspective.

4.1.3. The Narrative

The narrative is essential in every drama series to keep the followers to continue viewing the next episode. The similarity in the narrative of the three dramas is that it is full of suspense. The drama *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) contains elements of suspense in the narrative for instance, from the beginning the viewers do not know why Ersalina is willing to accept a stranger as her husband and actually her mother wants to take Zain as the scapegoat to hide her daughter's sin of carrying a child out of wedlock. And the element of suspense continues with the presence of Ersalina's ex-boyfriend who comes to redeem himself.

The element of suspense is also found in the narrative of *Aishiteru* (2011). Every episode of suspense is included in the narration for example the scenes in the kidnapping of Tasya by her stepmother. The element of suspense is even more effective with the impact of the shot, slow motion, zoom in and the soundtrack used in the drama. We note the scene where Ferry wants to delete the CCTV recording in the doctor's room - the recording shows that he is the one who kills Tasya's father. The slow effect motion is used to show Ferry's reaction when deleting the recording from the computer and this continues with the scene where Tasya and Tristan running towards the doctor's room. Upon reaching there, the camera zooms in to the reactions given by Tasya and Tristan and this continues to the doctor's room with no one present. These scenes have used some alarming music. This is another piece of evidence that the shot, slow motion, zoom in and music play a big part in making the drama more effective.

Meanwhile, in *Secret Garden* (2011), it is also suspenseful. This is in the scene where Kim Joo Wun had swapped bodies with Gil Ra Im. Several comedic scenes have occurred during the swapping of the body and so there are elements of suspense. Another suspense element also happens when Gil Ra Im gets lost in the forest and she and Kim Joo Wun cycle around Jeju Island. The romantic elements are also evident in these three dramas. In *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013), for instance, Zain is shown spying on Ersalina when she goes to school to take her results, although they are having a fight at the time. Songs are used to consolidate these romantic scenes. This is also evident in *Aishiteru* (2011) and *Secret Garden* (2011). The theme song *That Man* is played when Kim Joo Wun meets Gil Ra Im at the shopping mall. The CU and Track shots help make the scenes more effective.

The romantic element is proven in *Aishiteru* (2011), the same way it is highlighted in Setia Hujung Nyawa (2013) and Secret Garden (2011). Tristan gives Tasya a cat to make her happy because she is upset over the loss of her father although we later find out that Tristan is allergic to cat's fur. This scene also depends on the theme song to give a more meaningful impact to the romantic scene. Sad narratives can also be found in the three dramas. In *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013), Zain is devastated to learn that his wife has had a miscarriage although they never sleep together. This sad narration is represented using flashback about romantic scenes which are previously accompanied by the theme song. Meanwhile, in *Aishiteru* (2011) there is also a sad narrative in a scene where Tristan learns that Tasya has passed away, and the flashback is also used with the theme song. Flashback is also used in the *Secret Garden* (2011) when there is sad narration and as an example in a narrative where the main male character Kim Joo-Wun separates with Gil Ra-Im for the first time.

There is also a difference in the narration of the three dramas series. The narration about religion is not introduced in *Secret Garden* (2011) and it is also included in *Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013) and *Aisihiteru* (2011). In the drama series *Aishiteru* (2011) which tells about Tasya's father getting involved in an accident, Tristan advises Tasyah to pray to Allah SWT and to continue being patient. Thus, the narrative that has the elements was well received by the viewers from the region and it has to be supported by camera work techniques and editing so that it can be effective. The difference of the narrative is the elements of religion represented in the dramas.

All in all, the three dramas series have used the theme of love and represent them with a way that is suited to the context of the original country. It can increase the cultural discount but the love theme is said to be universal so the cultural discount is reduced. Other than that, family values are used in all three dramas creating relatable feelings and emotions and it is known as cultural similarity they are well received by the local viewers. In terms of the characterization, the male characters are represented according to the perfect Asian identity 'beauty masculin', rich, kind-hearted and Asian female characters are beautiful, have their own personality and are often protected by the men around them. The narrative with the elements of suspense, romantic, and sad is included in these dramas and the effectiveness increased through camera work, editing and theme songs. Thus, the theme, characterization and the narrative reduce the cultural discount while through the similarities it has created the identity and characteristics of very well-received Asian dramas series known as cultural similarity.

4.2. Factors of the Popularity of Local Drama Series and Asian Drama Series from the Perspective of the Local Industry.

Producers' decisions are very important in a production of a drama series that can fulfill the requirements and demands of viewers. Therefore, the demands and needs of the viewers need to be fulfilled the best way possible to reach high viewing rating for a drama series. The theme that follows the trend has become the main factor that contributes to the popularity of the dramas series among local viewers. Suriyati Sidek is one of the local drama

series producers like *Nora Elena* (2011) and *Vanila Coklat* (2012) which reach high viewing rating. In an interview with her, she suggested that television stations can produce more dramas series. Thus, the producer will follow the trend that can meet the demands of the viewers.

> *"As a drama producer, rating is vital to enable us to get slots in the Malaysian television stations. Thus, in the best way possible, we try to follow the trend. We will follow the trend that people want.*

This is also agreed by Julia Juhasu, who is a well-known producer in the local industry and one of the productions is the case study to the analysis *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013). She stated that the theme of a drama series must be determined by the 'trend' or that the theme must follow the viewers' needs and demands.

> *"As a producer, we will give a drama that the viewers want to see. The theme that has become the trend today is love conveyed through the narration involving family issues, spiritual issues and these become the priority in the company when producing dramas. And through the theme that they want, viewers will follow the drama to the very last episode "*

Suriyati Sidek stated that the theme of drama series most favoured by local viewers today is love where it tells about forced marriage, love after marriage and marriage at a young age as well as drama series adapted through love novels.

> *"The majority of viewers, young and old need something that can play with their feelings. When they watch a drama series, be it local or foreign, most viewers will place themselves in that character. And they like something that is not real. Watching drama is like selling drama where the scenes in the drama may not sell and people will not experience them in real life. One love can start beautifully and there will be obstacles along the way and finlly the hero and heroine will reunite in the end."*

She also added that for the drama series the evening slot is the most popular where the drama is romantic comedy and this kind of narrative will become the producer's choice to be forwarded to the television station. Therefore, it is found that the theme that follows the trend is the main factor that contributes to the popularity of local and Asian dramas series. Producer will give the drama series that caters for the requirements and needs of the local viewers. The theme that follows the latest trend today is the love theme revolving around forced marriage, love after marriage and marriage at a young age where they will touch on family issues and spirituality which are delivered in the form of romantic comedy. This is to achieve high viewing rating so producers will be able to get more slots in the TV station.

Other than that, the drama series script is also important to contribute to the popularity among the local viewers. According to Suriyati Sidek, to produce a favourite drama with loyal followers is a very important element in the production of popular dramas series.

> *"The most important thing in drama production is the script. Drama scripts have to be good and the narration is not loose especially for long series dramas. A good script often gives a certain kind of suspense to viewers such as something unexpected happening in th enext narration so people will follow through, to know what happens next to the hero or the heroine. We must be reminded that the Malaysian drama series always have 13 episodes or more. If the story is ambiguous how do we engage people in the story, let alone keep following the drama?*

Thus, a good script is one of the factors for the popularity of a drama series locally in Malaysia and in Asia. The main challenge in the drama series production is to keep the viewers engaged, where they follow the narration in the next episodes. Thus, the script has to have suspenseful elements, so that viewers will not be bored towards lengthy dramas and stay engaged for the next episodes.

A good casting for the characters is also an essential element in contributing to the popularity of the dramas series. According to Julia Juhasu and Suriyati Sidek, they stated that the choice of artists that goes well with the character is vital, where they carry the narration and make it more interesting. Meanwhile, popular artists do not necessarily popularise the drama series. According to Suriyati Sidek,

> *"Dramas series do not really require popular artists for the characters of hero and heroine to make the dramas popular. Popular artists do contribute to popularity. Automatically they will make the viewers eager and excited to see the next episodes. In Malaysia, handsome and beautiful new actors will automatically contribute to the drama popularity."*

Julia Juhasu also agreed that the popularity of an artist will not contribute to the popularity of a drama series. She stated that the quality of acting and the chemistry between the main characters are important in drama performance and this will help increase the popularity of the drama series.

> *"We will choose artists who fit the story line and the artists need to delve into the characters they are carrying. We do not account for their popularity in casting. This is because when these popular artists do not have quality acting, this will give a bad impact to a drama. If the quality acting and chemistry between two main characters can be created dan chemistry between the main actors will increase the popularity of the drama series."*

Thus, it is found that the right choice of artists with the story line is vital in contributing to the popularity of a drama series. Artists with good quality acting and the right chemistry between the male and female characters are vital because through this, the narration can be delivered in a more interesting way. The artists' popularity does not determine viewers to stay engaged in the drama but good looking actors will automatically contribute to the popularity among the local viewers. Other than that, theme songs will contribute to the popularity of a drama series. Both these producers agreed that the theme songs play an important role for the dramas series. Suriyati Sidek stated that the theme songs play an important role in dramas series and more than one song will be included in an episode and the song will be repeated several times in an episode.

> *"The song lyrics have to be consistent with the scenes shown. With very interesting lyrics and songs, viewers will continue to be carried away especially in romantic scenes between the hero and heroine. The right choice of songs and montage are also vital. Normally, current popular songs will be the theme songs for the drama series. Although only for 50 seconds, the right selection of songs will be more prioritised. By understanding the lyrics and montage alone this will keep the viewers glued to the TV and this will automatically contribute to the popularity of a drama".*

Julia Juhasu stated that the right choice of songs to be the theme songs is very important to deliver the message and narration more effectively. The songs selected are not ony existing ones but also songs specially composed for the dramas. Thus, these theme songs will contribute to the dramas' popularity so that the messages delivered will be more effective and they can play with the viewers' feelings and emotions when they are watching especially romantic songs.

In sum, among the factors that contribute to the local and Asian dramas series are themes that follow the trend, a good script, the right casting and appropriate theme songs. The producer has a big authority not only in the executive power but also in the power of creativity. The decisions made by the producer are important to render a drama series a success. They decide on the theme, script,

artists and the theme songs. The theme chosen must follow the requirement and needs of the local viewers. A good script is also essential in a drama series. Suspenseful scripts will help ensure that viewers will follow the development of the story, from the beginning to the end.

The right choice of artists will also be vital to the popularity of the drama series where popular artists will not only help popularise the drama series but they also have to show quality acting and a good chemistry. In Malaysia good looking actors will contribute to the popularity of a drama. Other than that, appropriate theme songs will also ensure the popularity of a drama series. The theme song will help deliver a more meaningful message in a drama series especially when it comes to romantic scenes.

5. Conclusion

The similarities of themes, characters and narrations in popular Asian dramas series in this study *Setia Di Hujung Nyawa* (2013), *Aishiteru* (2011) and *Secret Garden* (2011) serve to be the method and approach that can reduce the cultural discount where through these similarities, they are able to build upon the identity and characteristics of Asian dramas series that are well-received by the Asian viewers – known as the cultural similarity. From these popular dramas, love is shown to be the main theme and this is adapted to the context of each original country. Despite this, the dramas series can increase the cultural discount but the love theme is the universal one so the cultural discount is reduced. Other than that, family values are also used in the three dramas creating a sense of normalcy in their feelings and emotions – this is known as the cultural similarity so the dramas series are well-received. In terms of the characterization, the male characters are represented as a perfect Asian identity 'beauty masculin', rich, kind-hearted and Asian women are pretty, have their own personality and often protected by the men around them. Suspenseful, romantic and sad narratives are included in the selected dramas series and these elements are made more effective through good camera work, editing and theme songs.

Producer plays an important role in rendering a drama series a success and the decision made will automatically contribute to the popularity of a drama series. For instance, in terms of the theme choice, script, artists, director, theme song and so on. Also their decisions follow the latest trend required by the viewers. It is found that among the local viewers, the love theme is their choice. It revolves around forced marriage, love after marriage, marriage at young age and family issues are characteristic of today's dramas series. A good script is also the recipe for drama series success. Suspenseful scripts will engage viewers from the beginning to the end of the story. The other two factors are great casting the right chemistry between the actors. It is found that popular artists do not contribute to the popularity of the drama series in the Malaysian context while good looking actors will contribute to the popularity of a drama series. Theme songs are also important in ensuring the popularity of a drama, where they will deliver more meaningful messages to a drama series, especially during romantic scenes between female and male actors.

All in all, the flow of Asian drama series can be regarded as the process of regionalisation where it has represented unique Asian values and these have been explained by two concepts namely cultural discount and cultural similarity. Asian drama producers try to reduce this cultural discount using a universal theme like love but it has been adapted to the context of the country producing the drama. Like in Malaysia, the theme of love is used to popularize a drama series but it is accompanied by the latest mainstream story like forced marriage, love after marriage or being married at young age. These Asian dramas are seen to have the same element where it creates the feelings and emotions relatable among the Asian viewers known as the cultural approach. This element includes the Asian values, the use of actors with Asian identity for example those looking Pan-Asian, polite, beautiful, masculine and so on.

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